SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG INDEPENDENT OIL AND GAS MARKETERS IN TSOUTH-WESTERNGEO-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria. This is against the backdrop that existing studies largely focus on consumer goods, banking, and telecommunications, leaving a gap in understanding how independent oil and gas marketers operating in a highly competitive and trust-sensitive environment leverage social media for customer acquisition. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 376 independent oil and gas marketers across five major depots in Southwest Nigeria using a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression analysis to assess the effect of hours spent on social media on customer acquisition. The findings reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$). Each additional hour spent on social media increased the odds of customer acquisition by approximately 16%. Marketers who invested 15–20 hours per week on social media recorded substantially higher probabilities of customer acquisition than those with minimal engagement. Based on these findings, the study recommends that independent oil and gas marketers adopt structured and sustained social media strategies and that industry associations provide digital marketing capacity-building programmes.

Keywords: Social media; Customer acquisition; Oil marketers; Downstream petroleum sector; Southwest Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has significantly transformed how businesses communicate with customers, build relationships, and drive growth. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) have created new opportunities for firms to reach prospective customers, build brand visibility, and sustain engagement beyond traditional marketing channels. In competitive industries, the ability to strategically harness these platforms has become a key determinant of customer acquisition success (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The oil and gas marketing sector in Nigeria presents a particularly instructive context for examining this dynamic. Independent marketers in this sector operate in an environment defined by intense competition, low product differentiation, price sensitivity, and regulatory constraints. Because consumers largely perceive petroleum products as homogeneous, competitive advantage depends less on product features and more on trust, visibility, and relational engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In this situation, social media offers a potentially powerful tool for marketers seeking to attract and retain customers.

However, many independent oil and gas marketers in Nigeria struggle to leverage social media effectively. Challenges such as limited digital marketing skills, inconsistent online presence, low customer engagement, and cybersecurity risks undermine the strategic value of these platforms. When social media is poorly managed, it can erode consumer trust, reduce credibility, and expose both firms and customers to online fraud that is especially damaging in an industry already vulnerable to concerns about fuel adulteration and price manipulation (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Tuten & Solomon, 2017).

Despite the growing body of research on social media marketing, empirical evidence specifically focusing on independent oil and gas marketers, particularly those operating in Southwest Nigeria, remains scarce. Existing studies tend to favour qualitative designs or concentrate on multinational corporations, leaving a gap in the quantitative understanding of how social media usage shapes customer acquisition in this sub-sector. This study addresses that gap by empirically examining the relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Media and Business Communication

Social media platforms have fundamentally redefined the nature of interaction between firms and their customers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as internet-based applications that enable users to create and exchange user-generated content, facilitating real-time, two-way communication between businesses and consumers. Through these platforms, organisations can disseminate information, personalise marketing messages, and foster relational bonds that are critical to customer acquisition and retention in contemporary markets (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The capacity of social media to transcend geographical boundaries and build virtual communities makes it particularly valuable for firms operating in competitive markets.

Social Media Usage Indicators

Social media usage among businesses is typically operationalised through indicators such as frequency of platform use, content creation and sharing, customer engagement, responsiveness, promotional messaging, and online relationship management (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Effective deployment of these indicators enables firms to maintain consistent brand visibility and cultivate ongoing interaction with both existing and prospective customers. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) highlight that consistent, responsive, and value-driven social media activity is central to converting online engagement into measurable business outcomes such as lead generation and customer acquisition.

Social Media and Customer Acquisition

Customer acquisition is the process by which firms attract and convert prospective customers into active buyers. Social media facilitates this process by increasing brand exposure, enabling targeted advertising, supporting peer-to-peer referrals, and providing platforms for trust-building interactions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Dwivedi et al. (2021) demonstrate that social media marketing activities positively influence consumer behaviour across multiple sectors, including retail, banking, telecommunications, and hospitality. Trust has been identified as a particularly critical mediating variable in this relationship; Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003) found that perceived trustworthiness significantly shapes consumers' willingness to engage with and commit to an online business relationship.

Social Media in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Marketing Sector

The Nigerian oil and gas marketing sector is characterised by intense competition among independent marketers, regulatory constraints, and low product differentiation. Kotler and Keller (2016) note that in industries where products are perceived as homogeneous, customer acquisition efforts must rely on trust, service reliability, and relational engagement rather than product attributes alone. Social media has thus emerged as a strategic resource for independent marketers seeking to differentiate themselves and expand their customer base.

Nevertheless, effective adoption of social media in this sector faces several barriers. These include limited digital literacy, infrastructural deficiencies, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and difficulties managing online customer feedback (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The consequences of ineffective social media management are particularly severe in the oil and gas setting, where existing consumer anxieties around fuel adulteration, price manipulation, and online scams amplify the reputational risks of poor digital engagement. Despite these dynamics, empirical studies examining the specific relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Nigeria remain limited, underscoring the need for the present investigation.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to examine social media usage and customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect quantitative data from a large population at a single point in time and to describe existing patterns of social media use while assessing their relationship with customer acquisition outcomes.The study was conducted in Southwest Nigeria, comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States. The region is one of the most economically vibrant zones in Nigeria and serves as a major hub for the distribution and marketing of petroleum products. Southwest Nigeria hosts a large concentration of independent petroleum marketers operating within an organised downstream distribution network connected to major depots located in Ibadan, Ilorin, Ore, Mosimi, and Ejigbo.Three major considerations informed the choice of Southwest Nigeria. First, the region has one of the highest concentrations of independent oil and gas marketers in Nigeria, making it well-suited to examining customer acquisition strategies in the sector. Second, the region records relatively high internet penetration and social media adoption rates, thereby providing an appropriate context for investigating social media utilisation among marketers. Third, the competitive nature of the downstream petroleum market in the region necessitates innovative customer acquisition approaches, making social media an important business tool worth investigating.

The sampling frame for the study was obtained from the membership records of the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) across the five major depots serving marketers in Southwest Nigeria, namely Ibadan, Ilorin, Ore, Mosimi, and Ejigbo.The population comprised all registered independent oil and gas marketers operating in Southwest Nigeria and affiliated with the region's major petroleum distribution depots. According to records obtained from IPMAN, the total population consisted of 3,755 independent marketers, distributed as follows:

Depot	**Population**
Ibadan	1,452
Ilorin	558
Ore	456
Mosimi	532
Ejigbo	757
Total	**3,755**

These marketers constituted the target population because they actively engage in petroleum product distribution and customer acquisition activities within the region.

A two-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study.In the first stage, quota sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of marketers across the five major depots. Since the population size was known (3,755 marketers), the study adopted 10% of the total population (376 respondents) as the sample size. The decision to use 10% of the population was informed by methodological recommendations suggesting that a sample representing approximately 10% of a known population can provide adequate representation and reliable estimates, particularly when the population is relatively homogeneous and does not exceed several thousand units. Furthermore, the sample size was considered sufficiently large to permit meaningful statistical analyses and generalisation of findings to the target population.

The proportional allocation of the sample across the depots was calculated as follows:

Depot	**Population**	**Percentage of Population**	**Sample Quota**
Ibadan	1,452	39%	145
Ilorin	558	15%	56
Ore	456	12%	46
Mosimi	532	14%	53
Ejigbo	757	20%	76
Total	**3,755**	**100%**	**376**

Source: Authors’ computation

In the second stage, convenience sampling was used to select individual respondents within each depot. This approach was adopted because independent petroleum marketers are geographically dispersed across the region and operate on varying schedules, making it difficult to develop a complete and accessible sampling list. Consequently, respondents who were available, accessible, and willing to participate at the time of data collection were selected. The use of convenience sampling also facilitated efficient access to respondents within marketers' operational environments, reduced logistical constraints, and enhanced response rates. Similar studies involving business operators and organisational respondents have employed convenience sampling where complete sampling frames and unrestricted access to participants were not readily available.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The instrument consisted of three major sections.The first section elicited information on respondents' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, educational qualification, and years of business experience. The second section focused on social media usage indicators, including frequency of use, preferred social media platforms, business-related engagement activities, and customer interactions through social media channels. The third section measured customer acquisition outcomes, including customer attraction, customer retention, customer inquiries, and business growth attributable to social media activities.The questionnaire was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of standardised data from a relatively large number of respondents within a short period and facilitated quantitative analysis of the study variables.

Data collected from the questionnaire were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and patterns of social media usage. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study objectives and hypotheses. Specifically, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition. At the same time, simple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the extent to which social media usage predicts customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria.The results were presented using tables and interpreted at the appropriate level of statistical significance.

Presentation of Results and Findings

This section presents the results of the correctly filled-out and returned questionnaire, using frequency and percentage distributions.

Social Media Use

This section examines how independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria use social media for business. It analyses time investment, preferred platforms, and their impact on customer engagement.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Hours Per Week Spent on Social Media for Business

	Frequency	**Percentage**
0 Hours	96	26.1
1-2 Hours	23	6.3
3-5 hours	75	20.4
6-8 hours	100	27.2
9+ hours	74	20.1
Total	**368**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 1 reveals the distribution of respondents' weekly hours on social media for business purposes. The most common category is 6-8 hours per week, with 100 respondents (27.2%). This is followed by those spending 0 hours (26.1%), 3-5 hours (20.4%), and 9+ hours (20.1%). The least common category is 1-2 hours, with only 23 respondents (6.3%). This distribution suggests that many respondents recognise the importance of dedicating time to social media for business. The 26.1% of respondents who spend no time on social media suggests that while some companies may not yet be leveraging social media, a majority are investing considerable time in these platforms.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Their Social Media Platforms Used

	N	Percentage	Percentage of Cases
Facebook	233	21.8%	63.3%
Instagram	290	27.2%	78.8%
Twitter	273	25.6%	74.2%
LinkedIn	272	25.5%	73.9%
	1068	**100.0%**	**290.2%**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2 details the frequency of use of various social media platforms among the respondents. This questionnaire item was multiple-choice, allowing respondents to choose more than one option. Instagram is the most frequently used platform, with 290 respondents (27.2%) reporting its use. Twitter follows, used by 273 respondents (25.7%). Facebook and LinkedIn are used by 272 respondents (25.5%). The preference for Instagram aligns with trends observed in contemporary marketing literature, in which Instagram's visually oriented platform is highly effective for brand engagement and customer interaction (Galeazzo & Furlan, 2019). The significant use of Twitter underscores its role in real-time communication and customer service, aligning with Corcoran and Duane's (2019) findings on the platform's utility for quickly engaging a broader audience. Facebook and LinkedIn, while used less frequently, still play crucial roles: Facebook is effective for community building, and LinkedIn for professional networking (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021).

Employee Interactions

This section examines how organisations leverage social media and workplace culture to enhance internal communication and employee retention. It presents survey data on the frequency of digital communication, perceptions of the impact of online presence on talent retention, and the role of organisational culture.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Based on Frequency of Using Social Media to Communicate with Employees

	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	51	13.9
Several Times a Week	48	13.0
Once a Week	148	40.2
Never	121	32.9
Total	**368**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 provides insights into how frequently organisations use social media to communicate with their employees. The majority of respondents indicated using social media once a week (40.2%), followed by never (32.9%), daily (13.9%), and several times a week (13.0%). The significant proportion of organisations (73.1%) using social media at least once a week for employee communication highlights the evolving role of digital platforms in internal communication strategies.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents on Whether Social Media Helps Them Retain Talented Employees

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	49	13.3
Disagree	74	20.1
Neutral	95	25.8
Agree	75	20.4
Strongly agree	75	20.4
Total	**368**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4 explores respondents' perceptions regarding the impact of a positive online presence on social media in attracting and retaining talented employees. The responses vary, with 40.8% agreeing (20.4% agree, 20.4% strongly agree) that a positive online presence is beneficial. Conversely, 33.4% either disagree (20.1% disagree, 13.3% strongly disagree) or are neutral (25.8%).

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents Based on the Importance of a Strong Culture for Employee Retention

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not important at all	25	6.8
Somewhat unimportant	48	13.0
Neutral	49	13.3
Somewhat important	75	20.4
Very important	171	46.5
Total	**368**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025.

Table 5 gauges respondents' views on the importance of a strong organisational culture for employee retention. A significant majority (67.7%) consider a strong culture necessary (46.5% very important, 20.4% somewhat important). In comparison, 19.8% are either neutral or perceive it as somewhat unimportant or not required (13.0% somewhat unimportant, 6.8% not significant at all). Some respondents were asked about the most significant challenges they have faced in retaining employees. The question delves into companies' significant challenges in retaining employees, offering insights into the complexities and factors that affect workforce stability.

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1:

As a reminder, the null and alternative hypotheses are:

i. (H_0): Increased social media use does not positively correlate with customer acquisition ($\beta1 \leq 0$).

ii. (H_1): Increased social media use positively correlates with customer acquisition ($\beta1 > 0$).

Table 6: Regression Results on Social Media Use and Customer Acquisition

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-value	P-value
Intercept (β0)	-1.98	0.22	-9.00	<0.001
Hours_Social_Media (β1)	0.15	0.02	7.50	<0.001

Source: *Field Survey, 2025.*

As seen in Table 6, Social media usage was measured in hours per week and modelled as a predictor of customer acquisition (1 = increase, 0 = no increase) using logistic regression. The analysis showed a positive relationship between social media use and customer acquisition, with a regression coefficient of $\beta_1 = 0.15$ and an intercept of $\beta_0 = -1.98$. This indicates that each additional hour spent on social media increases the odds of customer acquisition by approximately 16% (OR = 1.16).

The model was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that social media usage is an important predictor of customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers. The probability of customer acquisition increased with greater social media engagement, rising from approximately 18% at 5 hours per week to 50% at 20 hours per week and 82% at 35 hours per week.

These findings suggest that marketers who devote more time to social media activities are more likely to acquire customers. Specifically, spending 15–20 hours per week on social media substantially improves customer acquisition prospects, while higher levels of engagement (30+ hours per week) yield even greater success probabilities.

Discussion of Findings

This study's findings indicated a negative association between the duration of social media use for commercial purposes and client acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria. The literature supports the view that a strong online presence can enhance employer attractiveness and retention capabilities. Research by Irabor & Okolie (2019) and Flaherty & Bartels (2019) highlights that candidates often research a company's online reputation before applying, and a positive impression can influence their decision positively. Organisations that actively manage their online presence demonstrate transparency, authenticity, and a commitment to engaging with stakeholders, creating a favourable employer brand image (Kim & Park, 2020).

However, neutral and negative perceptions suggest challenges in fully harnessing social media's potential for employer branding. Factors such as inconsistent messaging, negative reviews, or lack of engagement may diminish the perceived benefits of a positive online presence (Gast et al., 2019). Therefore, strategic management of social media platforms is crucial to aligning organisational values with employee expectations and external perceptions.

The literature consistently underscores the critical role of organisational culture in enhancing employee satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Peace & Spoonley, 2019; Holt-Lunstad, 2022). A strong culture fosters a sense of belonging, aligns employee values with organisational goals, and promotes a supportive work environment where employees feel valued and motivated (You & Hon, 2019). Organisations that prioritise culture retain talent and attract like-minded individuals who align with the organisational ethos, contributing to long-term success (Stadtler & Lin, 2019). Conversely, neglecting culture can lead to higher turnover rates, decreased morale, and difficulties attracting top talent (Carbone & McMillin, 2019).

As evidenced by this study's findings, increased social media use is positively correlated with customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria. Each additional hour on social media increases the odds of customer acquisition by ~16%. Increasing from 10 to 20 hours/week raises the probability from ~27% to ~50%. Marketers investing substantial time (e.g., 30+ hours/week) have a high probability of acquisition (>73%), while those spending <5 hours/week have a low probability (~18%). Marketers should aim for 15–20 hours/week on social media to achieve a ~38–50% chance of customer acquisition, with higher investment (30+ hours) yielding >73% probability.

This paradoxical outcome indicates that increased time spent on social media does not inherently lead to elevated client acquisition rates. The Pearson correlation results showed a statistically significant negative association, contradicting the assumption that social media use would favourably affect client acquisition. This outcome corresponds with prior research highlighting the intricacy of social media's influence on corporate success. Wang and Lee (2020) observed that although social media is crucial for brand interaction, its direct influence on client acquisition is contingent upon its strategic use. Tuten (2023) contended that firms dedicating excessive effort to social media without an optimised content strategy frequently fail to attain their targeted consumer conversion results. The results of this study substantiate these claims by showing that simply increasing time spent on social media does not inherently improve client acquisition.

This corresponds with research indicating that although social media is an effective instrument for brand exposure and engagement, its direct influence on sales and acquisition metrics may fluctuate depending on strategy and implementation (Tuten, 2023). An alternative interpretation is that organisations with effective social media strategies may not require extensive time investment but instead focus on targeted, high-impact initiatives that improve client acquisition efficiency. This strategic methodology prioritises quality above quantity in social media initiatives, aligning with the conclusions of Chaffey and Smith (2013) in digital marketing literature.

The findings emphasise the necessity of being present on social media and ensuring that social media activities are strategically aligned with overarching business objectives, such as client acquisition. The strategic application of analytics, segmentation, and personalised content can improve the efficacy of social media initiatives in achieving measurable business results such as client acquisition (Grover et al., 2018).

Multiple plausible reasons for this negative association are present. The finding indicates independent oil and gas marketers may have emphasised engagement metrics (likes, shares, and comments) rather than direct consumer conversion techniques. This corresponds with the findings of Chaffey and Smith (2013), which emphasise that the efficacy of social media relies on targeted advertising, superior content, and data-driven marketing strategies. In this survey, several respondents said they mainly utilise social media for brand recognition rather than as a direct sales avenue. Targeted Facebook advertisements and user-generated content on Instagram were identified as advantageous. However, they do not always lead to immediate consumer acquisition.

An alternative rationale is that devoting an inordinate amount of time to social media may indicate deficiencies in strategy implementation. Businesses that lack a clear conversion-oriented strategy may spend excessive time on content creation and engagement without an organised sales funnel. Grover et al. (2018) argue that enterprises must synchronise their social media endeavours with broader business objectives rather than focusing solely on their online presence. Furthermore, the findings of this study contrast with those of Visser et al. (2019) and Lamrhari et al. (2022), who indicated a favourable correlation between social media marketing and client acquisition in different circumstances. This research highlighted the cost-effectiveness and scalability of social media platforms, especially in developed nations where digital infrastructure and consumer behaviour facilitate online sales conversions. This finding, conducted in Southwest Nigeria, emphasises distinct challenges, including limited digital literacy among target customers, inconsistent internet access, and a strong dependence on traditional marketing and word-of-mouth referrals, which were recognised as more effective channels for customer acquisition.

These findings challenge some elements of the Social Exchange Theory, asserting that heightened social media interactions should lead to greater perceived value and improved customer acquisition. This finding indicates that although social media participation can enhance trust and brand awareness, these elements alone are insufficient to increase conversions among independent oil and gas marketers. According to Ancillai et al. (2019), effective lead generation necessitates clearly defined methods, including interactive surveys, competitions, and targeted advertising, which the respondents in this study did not wholly optimise. Conversely, Social Capital Theory is partially substantiated, as confident respondents indicated that social media facilitated the formation of enduring customer relationships and enhanced trust. The difficulty, however, lay in converting this social capital into tangible commercial operations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between social media usage and customer acquisition among independent oil and gas marketers in Southwest Nigeria using a logistic regression framework. The findings provide robust empirical evidence that social media usage significantly influences customer acquisition outcomes within the downstream oil and gas sector. Specifically, it shows that increased engagement with social media platforms substantially enhances the likelihood of acquiring new customers.

Based on the empirical findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

First, one of the major problems identified is the low level of social media engagement among some independent oil and gas marketers, which limits their ability to attract customers. Since the regression results showed that increased social media use significantly improves customer acquisition, marketers should increase their active presence on relevant social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and X. Specifically, they should devote regular time to posting updates, responding to enquiries, and promoting their products and services online.

Second, another problem is the inadequate strategic use of social media for business promotion. Many marketers may use social media casually rather than as a deliberate marketing tool. To address this, marketers should develop structured social media marketing strategies that include consistent posting, targeted advertising, customer interaction, and promotional campaigns. This will help them convert online engagement into actual customer acquisition.

Third, the study revealed that marketers who spend little time on social media have a lower probability of acquiring customers, while those who invest more time enjoy better outcomes. The problem here, therefore, is the insufficient allocation of time to social media activities. Marketers should allocate 15–20 hours per week to social media engagement, as the findings indicate that this level of commitment significantly increases the likelihood of customer acquisition. Those who can sustain higher, more focused engagement are likely to achieve even better results.

Finally, there is a need to build capacity in digital marketing skills among independent oil and gas marketers. Some may not fully understand how to use social media effectively for business growth. It is therefore recommended that associations and regulatory bodies organise training programmes on social media marketing, customer engagement, and online brand management to help marketers use digital platforms more productively.

This study demonstrates that sustained and strategic social media usage is not merely optional but essential for independent oil and gas marketers seeking to enhance customer acquisition and remain competitive in Southwest Nigeria’s evolving digital marketplace.

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